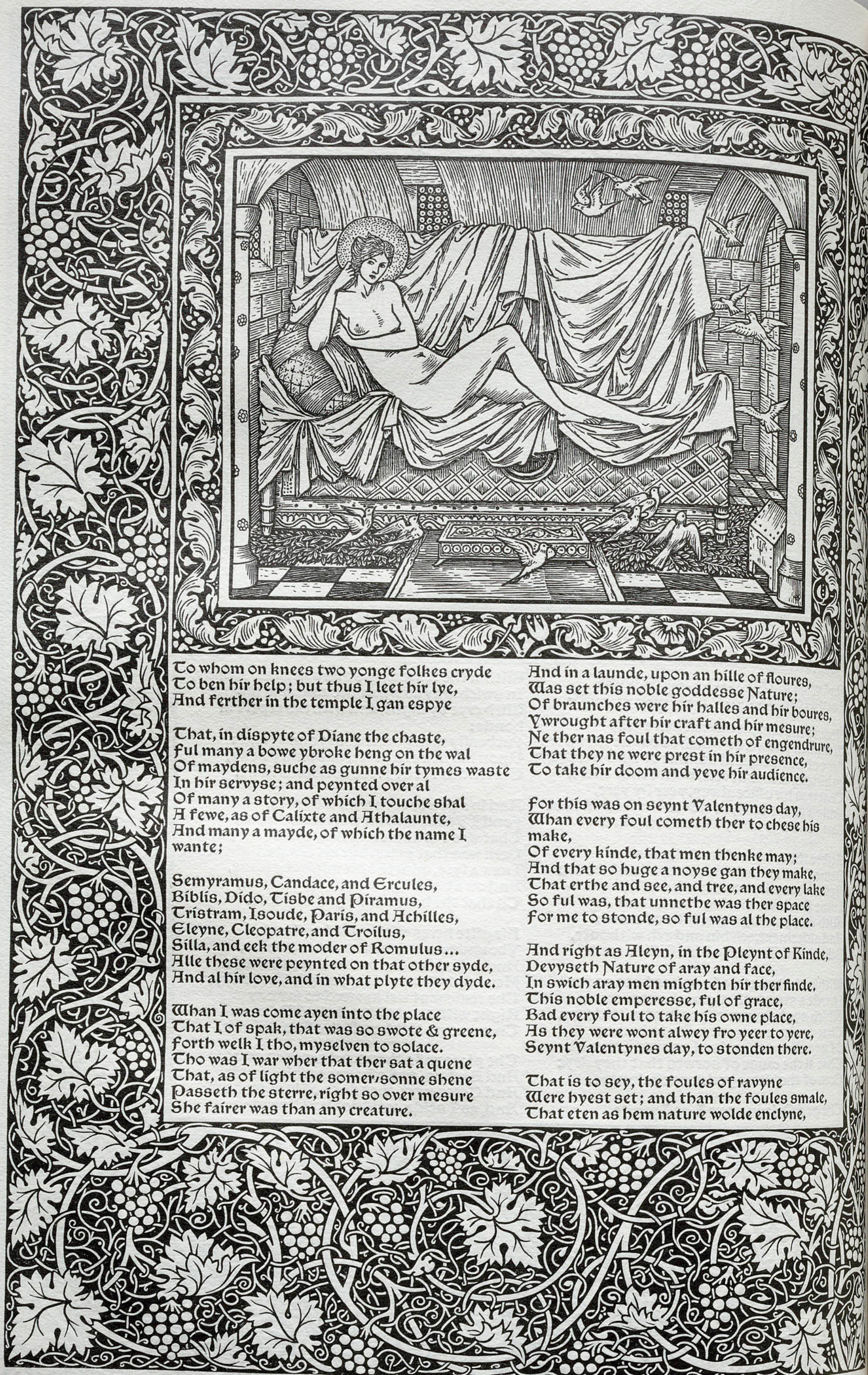




To whom on knees two yonge folkes cryde
To ben hir help; but thus I leet hir lye,
And ferther in the temple I gan espye

That, in dispyte of Diane the chaste,
ful many a bowe ybroke heng on the wal
Of maydens, suche as gunne hir tymes waste
In hir servyse; and peynted over al
Of many a story, of which I touche shal
A fewe, as of Calixte and Athalaunte,
And many a mayde, of which the name I
wante;

Semyramus, Candace, and Ercules,
Biblis, Dido, Tisbe and Piramus,
Tristram, Isoude, Paris, and Achilles,
Eleyne, Cleopatre, and Troilus,
Silla, and eek the moder of Romulus...
Alle these were peynted on that other syde,
And al hir love, and in what plyte they dyde.

Whan I was come ayen into the place
That I of spak, that was so swote & greene,
forth welk I tho, myselven to solace.
Tho was I war wher that ther sat a quene
That, as of light the somer sonne shene
Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
She fairer was than any creature.

And in a launde, upon an hille of floures,
Was set this noble goddesse Nature;
Of braunches were hir halles and hir boures,
Ywrought after hir craft and hir mesure;
Ne ther nas foul that cometh of engendrure,
That they ne were prest in hir presence,
To take hir doom and yeve hir audience.

for this was on seynt Valentynes day,
Whan every foul cometh ther to chese his
make,
Of every kinde, that men thenke may;
And that so huge a noyse gan they make,
That erthe and see, and tree, and every lake
So ful was, that unnethe was ther space
for me to stonde, so ful was al the place.

And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kinde,
Devyseth Nature of aray and face,
In swich aray men mighten hir ther finde.
This noble emperesse, ful of grace,
Bad every foul to take his owne place,
As they were wont alwey fro yere to yere,
Seynt Valentynes day, to stonden there.

That is to sey, the foules of ravyne
Were hyst set; and than the foules smale,
That eten as hem nature wolde enclyne,

As worm, or thing of whiche I telle no tale;
But waterfoul sat lowest in the dale;
And foul that liveth by seed sat on the grene,
And that so fele, that wonder was to sene.

Ther mighte men the royal egles finde,
That with his sharpe look perceth the sonne;
And other egles of a lower kinde,
Of which that clerkes wel devysen conne.
Ther was the tyraunt with his fethres donne
And greye, I mene the goshawk, that doth pyne
To briddes for his outrageous ravyne.

The gentil faucon, that with his feet distreyneth
The kinges hond; the hardy sperhawk eke,
The quayles foo; the merlion that peyneth
himself ful ofte, the larke for to seke;
Ther was the douve, with hir eyen meke;
The jalous swan, ayens his deth that singeth;
The oule eek, that of dethe the bode bringeth;

The crane the geaunt, with his trompes soun;e;
The theef, the chogh; and eek the jangling pye;
The scorming jay; the eles foo, the heroune;
The false lapwing, ful of trecherye;
The stare, that the counseyl can bewrye;
The tame ruddok; and the coward kyte;
The cok, that orloge is of thorpes lyte;

The sparow, Venus sone; the nightingale,
That clepeth forth the fresshe leves newe;
The swallow, morderer of the flyes smale
That maken hony of floures fresshe of hewe;
The wedded turtel, with hir herte trewe;
The peacock, with his augels fethres brighte;
The fesaunt, scormer of the cok by nighte;

The waker goos; the cukkitow ever unkinde;
The popinjay, ful of delicasye;
The drake, stroyer of his owne kinde;
The stork, the wreker of avouterye;
The hote cormeraunt of glotonye;
The raven wys, the crow with vois of care;
The throstel olde; the frosty feldefare.

What shulde I seyn? of foules every kinde
That in this worlde han fethres and stature,
Men mighten in that place assembled finde
Before the noble goddesse Nature.
And everich of hem did his besy cure
Benignely to chese or for to take,
By hir acord, his formel or his make.

But to the poynt... Nature held on hir honde
A formel egles, of shap the gentileste
That ever she among hir werkes fonde,
The most benigne and the goodlieste;
In hir was every vertu at his reste,
So ferforth, that Nature herself had blisse
To loke on hir, and ofte hir bek to hisse.

Nature, the vicaire of thalmyghty lorde,
That hoot, cold, hevy, light, and moist and dreye

Hath knit by even noumbre of acorde,
In esy vois began to speke and seye:
foules, tak hede of my sentence, I preye,
And, for your ese, in furthering of your nede,
As faste as I may speke, I wol me spede.

Ye know wel how, seynt Valentynes day,
By my statut and through my governaunce,
Ye come for to chese, and flee your way,
Your makes, as I prik yow with plesaunce.
But natheles, my rightful ordenaunce
May I not lete, for al this world to winne,
That he that most is worthy shal beginne.

The tercel egles, as that ye knowen wel,
The foul royal above yow in degree,
The wyse and worthy, secree, trewe as stel,
The which I formed have, as ye may see,
In every part as hit best lyketh me,
Hit nedeth noght his shap yow to devyse,
He shal first chese and speken in his gyse.

And after him, by order shul ye chese,
After your kinde, everich as yow lyketh,
And, as your hap is, shul ye winne or lese;
But which of yow that love most entryketh,
God sende him hir that sorest for him syketh.
And therwithal the tercel gan she calle,
And seyde: My sone, the choys is to thee falle.

But natheles, in this condicioun
Mot be the choys of everich that is here,
That she agree to his eleccioun,
Whoso he be that shulde been hir fere;
This is our usage alwey, fro yere to yere;
And who so may at this time have his grace,
In blisful tyme he com into this place.

With hed enclyned and with ful humble chere
This royal tercel spak and taried nought:
Unto my sovereyn lady, and noght my fere,
I chese, and chese with wille and herte & thought,
The formel on your hond so wel ywrought,
Whos I am al and ever wol hir serve,
Do what hir list, to do me live or sterve.

Beseching hir of mercy and of grace,
As she that is my lady sovereyne;
Or let me dye present in this place.
for certes, long may I not live in peyne;
for in myn herte is corven every veyne;
Having reward alonly to my trouthe,
My dere herte, have on my wo som routhe.

And if that I to hir be founde untrew,
Disobeysaunt, or wilful negligent,
Avauntour, or in proces love a newe,
I pray to you this be my jugement,
That with these foules I be al torent,
That ilke day that ever she me finde
To hir untrew, or in my gilte unkinde.

And sin that noon loveth hir so wel as I,